

“Inconceivable!”

Based on Acts 4:32-35

I thank Rev. Amanda Currie (First Presbyterian, Regina) for her inspiration.

The movie, “The Princess Bride,” (1987) is a whimsical tale of love and adventure set in an imaginary place where good triumphs over ill, and true love saves the day. During the adventure, Princess Buttercup is kidnapped by evil villains. As the villains attempt to make their escape with their prize, a masked man pursues them. They scale a high cliff, but the masked man follows. “Inconceivable!” the leader proclaims. A duel ensues with another member of the gang, but the masked man perseveres. “Inconceivable!” the leader proclaims again. A battle of wits follows over a cup of poisoned wine, and the mysterious masked man prevails. “Inconceivable!” the villain proclaims, before he drops dead from drinking the wine. When the mask is finally removed, the hero is discovered to be, the simple farm hand from Princess Buttercup’s stables, who had come to save his true love. “Inconceivable!”

Is it possible to have unity amid our diversity? It was an important question that came up time and time again, this year at General Assembly. “Inconceivable!” some said. You see, General Assembly is

one of those places where you begin to notice that our church is much more diverse than we realize. The Presbyterian flavor changes from coast to coast to coast. And if you think opinions are different here, in our Sanctuary, as they are, and as they should be, imagine spreading that diversity from the rural churches of Cape Breton to the inner city churches of West Toronto, to the house churches of the Cariboo.

At General Assembly you also begin to realize that different Christians are passionate about different things. Some thoroughly enjoy the doctrine of our church, and watch carefully to see that the letter of church law is followed precisely, even to the point of challenging our Moderator on rulings. There are those who love shaping language, and will agonize over the proper wording of motions, seeking amendment after amendment for change to the grammatical tone from one word to a different word. There are those who love to scheme, working out carefully that if one report is read before another report, than perhaps one unfavorable motion (in his or her opinion) may negate another motion. simply by default.

“Is it possible, then,” you might ask yourself, “to

accomplish anything meaningful in all of this?” Perhaps the word ‘inconceivable’ comes to mind at this point. And yes, there were commissioners there who were tired, worn out, weary from ‘keeping the faith’, disappointed with their church. There was clergy, burnt out or anxious about where they might serve next. There was administrative staff, probably more aware than the rest of us, of the ‘story behind the story’ with some of these motions, but unable to respond or react, as that was not their role. But that is not all.

Because we also heard things like our Past Moderator, who said, “Never underestimate the power of small.” We heard our new Moderator who reflected on words from Isaiah,

“With tranquility and restfulness shall you be saved, with quietude and trust shall be your might; (Isaiah 30:15)

“Where does the dawn of faith and the dash of life begin?” he asked. “When we can look at each other face to face.”

Is it possible to have unity within diversity? Yes. Because it is already happening. The variety of people and opinions at General Assembly proves that. The variety of people

and opinions from our churches coast to coast to coast proves that. The variety of people and opinions within our own pews proves that.

The Book of Acts tells us that as the disciples began to organize themselves into what we today would call, the church,

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had (v32)

In light of what I have shared with you about General Assembly, you might quietly have a question that goes something like this, "Did the disciples REALLY get along as well as the writer would have us believe? Did the disciples REALLY share everything without hidden agendas, a need to get the upper hand, or in a move to become the next Moderator?" The truth probably lies somewhere between yes and no.

But they tried. And when they failed, they tried again. And when they were tired, they went to bed and got up the next morning and tried again. And when they were discouraged, they went to a quiet place and prayed, and then they tried again. And because they kept trying, the church kept thriving and growing. And because they kept trying, the church still exists over all the history that has come after, and is still here in our villages and our cities and in our rural communities. And just like the church in Paul's day looked a little different from place to place, our Presbyterian church, too, looks a little different from place to place. But we are here! And we are faithful. We have failed in some things. We have fallen down. But we are still here. We are still faithful.

We must not give up on our church. We must not give up

on ourselves. We must remember, that no two people in a locked room will ever agree on everything all the time. It is not humanly possible. We can argue about how we are different, or how one opinion is better than the other, or we can keep trying: to be faithful believers, to be faithful servants to our Saviour, to be faithful to the challenge of being better and wiser brothers and sisters: to live and to love with "Glad and Generous Hearts."

The stable boy had loved Princess Buttercup from a distance, unable to speak those words freely. Instead, he said, "As you wish." Christ said,

"A new command I give you: Love one another." (John 13:34)

Our response should be, "As you wish."
Amen.